



Within 2000m

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within
2000m



ARdMackel
architects

Within 2000m

A contribution by ARdMackel architects to the Irish Architecture
Foundation's Project 20x20: *A Year Like No Other*

all images - 80mmx60mm - standard camera-phone aspect ratio

Published simultaneously, 24ú Meitheamh /June 2020,
Available online, in PDF, and as an E-book.

Gallows Hill productions 004

i.m.
Michael Sorkin

Response to Project 20 x 20: A Year Like No Other; 'within 2000m

Earlier this year (2020) the Irish Architecture Foundation (IAF) launched an inventive, imaginative online events programme that acknowledged the conditions, and, indeed, the government directives of what became known as 'the lockdown'. All of us (across these islands, with differing nuances in terms of distance) were asked - instructed - to stay at home. Though we were advised, that we should exercise daily (and in Republic of Ireland) to take our daily walks within 2000 metres (2Km) of our homes.

The IAF in teasing out creative opportunity from such confinement asked architects and designers to submit a photograph, drawing, or short 'film' that was source for inspiration or enquiry as they enjoyed a daily walk, which during the months of March and April was generally eased by lengthening days and sunshine.

We, in ARdMackel Architects, joined that call and the following images and short accompanying texts were part of our weekly online meetings and follow-up exchanges.

I am fortunate, as I walk from home to street, on a downward slope with the morning sun on my back, that I have two contrasting choices: to turn right and walk into what is really countryside, interrupted for a stretch by suburbia, or to continue ahead to the Georgian town which lifts and folds with the topography before dropping down to the old retail heart of the small town in which I live.

My colleagues have, of course, their own choices, but each is within the context of small town and rural life that is the holding-frame

of home for most people living in the north of the island: the north-eastern part of Ireland that always seems to endure binary conditions. And, also, in addition, images from our colleague in Paris.

The pages that follow contain series of images grouped within themes that have been part of our in-house discussions for some time. We each added our own captions and descriptions, and these are included in the appendix at the rear of this little publication. The initial texts will, no doubt, become more fluid and multi-layered as we continue to exchange and debate the conditions that inspire and feed our imaginations, and indeed, as our walking and travelling limits increase.

Each one of us present images as personal perspectives on thoughts inspired by 'Within 2000 metres', but also impacted by the lived and at times harsh realities of a severe pandemic, the result of which friends and colleagues paid the ultimate price for that most basic human instinct and need for closeness.

Ciarán Mackel
Meitheamh 2020

Participants

Aedán Mackel

Graduate architect, musician and songwriter, with a master's degree in Environmental Planning

Deirdre Mackel

Artist and arts facilitator

Fanny Guillaumin

Architect, hillwalker, artist and 'cheerleader'

John Catterson

Graduate architect, GAA footballer, artist with experience in making concrete 'furniture'

Kevin Reynolds

Architect, with background in property development and structural engineering, and former club and country player for Republic of Ireland

Ciarán Mackel

Architect, lecturer, writer, musician

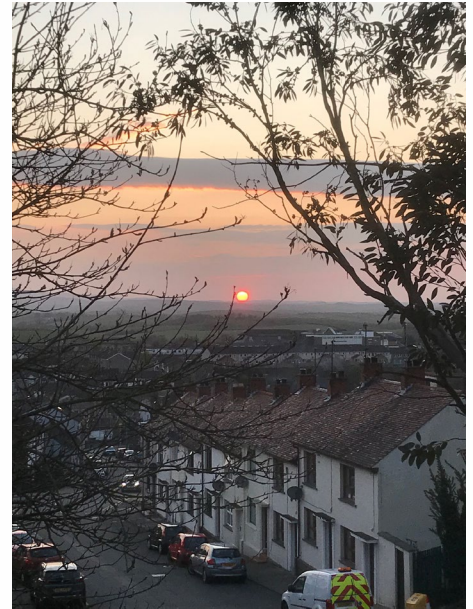








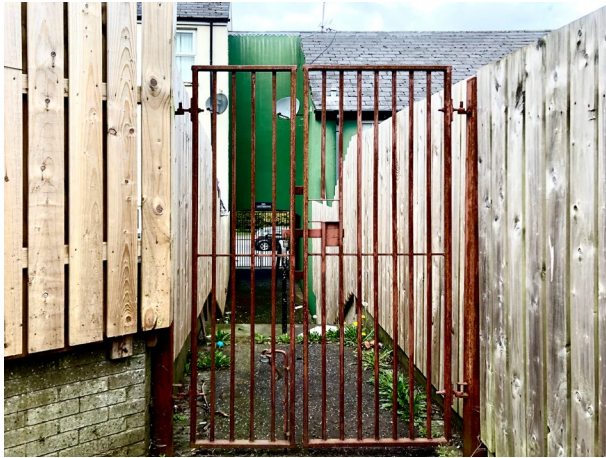
























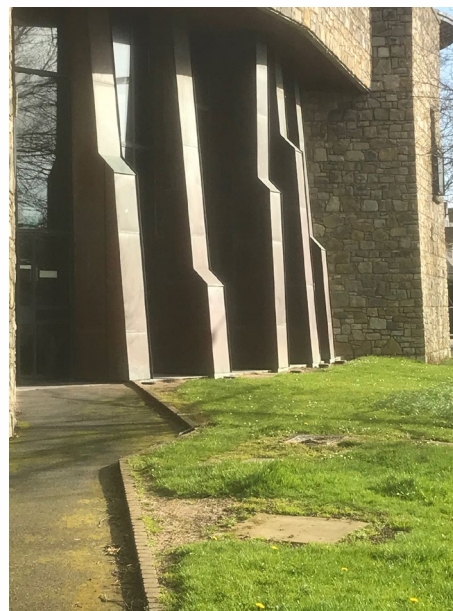


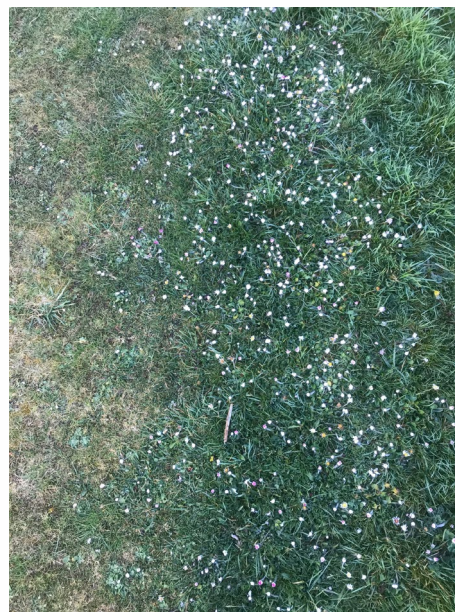






















Epilogue

Permanence and Place- /Land- scape

In a small country the built culture: the fabric of everyday places surrounds us all at an intimate level, and we take for granted the stories that could be told, if the stones could speak. We often fail to see the detail of our inheritance above the level of the shop front, or the paths and kerbs that, now, in many small towns and cities are being upgraded as 'public realm projects' and that, thankfully, replace the cheap mean-spirited material that diminished our walking experience, even though the frame that held it all together was good.

The small town in which I live has a rich Georgian core with many fine buildings. Four- and five-storey terraced stock alongside thematic buildings that tell the fullness of our material, cultural and political histories. The Irish, English and Scotch Streets that are common in the nomenclature of our places and which bind us all together, or as E. Estyn Evans once noted, 'help in the quickening of each other'.

That continuity of known form and material detail provides an atmosphere of comfort and of easy reference as we seek to learn from the layers of our architectural and building culture and explore the task of how a building might be anchored in topography and how walls, trees and the qualities and character of an urban place might help make rooms with careful placement of openings in walls.

The shift is clear to read from the monolithic wall of the Georgian buildings and the Victorian, Edwardian and early- and late- twentieth century buildings where the abutment of stone to timber box-sash

window, to when walls thinned and flattened, less visible detail, but nonetheless readable layers of stucco, insulation and waterproofing. There are few examples, in my town, of Modernism's interest in separation of skin and bone. And yet, that material honesty has always been alive in our culture.

And that sense of an architectural wholeness has helped in our practice search for a level of permanence in buildings we have designed that have been as much about a place for the permanence of the Irish language in the built culture of the city of Belfast in which most of our work is located.

The in-between

The little passageways that lead under archways into yards and clusters of out buildings that lie to the rear of most urban /street edge buildings always offer intrigue and ...adventure, perhaps. But provide opportunity, certainly, for architecture, not just in the promise that partial ruins evoke or in the incipient delight, but in the gaps - where the light sometimes does and does not get in - as part of the everyday: of the ordinary. We take pleasure in such mechanisms that afford exploration of filters and layers of courtyards, gardens and areas of porte-cochere that are intensified by the unifying motifs of doors and windows, thresholds across levels of intimacy that help make room.

The measurement of the block, of the street, the step width from door to door, or of width window opening all register for each of us and feed our drawings and making at a level of detail that is all the richer because of our experience and critical reflection.

The empty towns and streets that have been the ubiquitous signal of life for the Spring of 2020 has tended to loosen the glue that has

bound older, transient and new communities in the normal urban programme of a town. The relationship between the individual and the whole and the loss of a vibrant public realm has been to the detriment of us all. The sense that such is vital is probably now clearer, though, it seems, that 'nearness' will remain a challenge for some time.

The figure and ground of our cities and towns has faded. A certain hallowing out has occurred and may persist without concerted effort to activate and animate spaces, even if only using the crude diagrams of two-metre diameter circles in parks and public places.

Thresholds have been extended and lengthened to give a sense of protection at this moment in time. Our artists (forever our critical conscience) will interrogate and express this and that is exactly what we need to stir our drive ...our desire and need for urbanity: our need for closeness.

Room

During 'lockdown', I was asked by a friend of mine to forward photos of my garden to give sense of a place visited a number of years ago. I was struck by two things: firstly, that the untidy mess wouldn't photograph too well, and secondly, that 'garden' suggested a space: a signifier of home in an external sense that could only be part of the story of home, but also only part of the experience of garden.

I have, perhaps, eight garden rooms, the driveway up from the street to resting and parking space with trees, carport and store; the wide shrub- and flower-lined path to 'front' door (or is it the gable door); the garden of various levels with rock-face backdrop before the walled garden (c1750) with its own 'secret' garden (hardly) down a

slope to a set of steps and on, and out, and back to the place of the street, or to the backyard and above it to the re-wilded area that has never been un-wilded in our 35 years of stewardship, and thence back to whence I started.

The sun behind the clouds /The listening post behind the trees /
behind the suburb /behind the town /from the field behind my home.

A garden room that is enriched by long views out to the opposite hill on which the Cathedral stands atop the Georgian town and beyond to the Dromora Hills and obliquely to the Mourne. Like all rooms, the long view is both relief and assurance of our place in the world: a reward for belief in the cultural and phenomenological value of place-making and our contribution to its shaping and making.

The Picturesque

Much of the fabric of Irish towns is an unfolding of sequences of long and short views, built edges, gaps edged by walls and trees. A quality of ordinariness that is as much about townscape and landscape as about the unremarkable collection of things: of artefacts that root us in the memories and histories of a place, but that are also interpreted in our interiors as home calibrates those memories and sequences them into rich tapestries of intimate interior life. Landscapes hang on our walls. Images of favourite places adorn key surfaces, that say as much about the dolce vita, as about our need for connections and connectivity. A kind of naturalness that is evocative of ideals and idealised representations as about a certain discerning attitude to contemporary values. The three ducks on the wall, or the poster of a bullfight in 1970s Spain has given way to more complex and fragmented references.

The incidental moments of pavements, alleyways, arches and privatised areas are extensions of the interior spaces of our towns and whilst revealing a sense of privacy and interior belonging, are part of the wider urban place. It's partly an issue of scale. The measure of things that root us. That the step across the street is the width of two houses: that the expression of tenure that has shifted over time is a physical measure.

Texture and Detail

The 'art of inhabitation' as the Smithson's definition of their own work may not have been explicit reference to all of us over the period of working from home, but certainly niggles at the back of our minds as we juggle family and work commitments and draw and write on dining tables, kitchen worktops, or in garden sheds or attics. The search for comfortable place in which to think and work affirms the value and importance of process over formal output and as balance in the act of inhabitation reminds me of the suggestive power of Michael Sorkin's maxim that the process towards form is the space between the fish and the wriggle.

Colleagues have written of the opportunity of 'lockdown' to listen to old cassette tapes, or to re-string guitars to new tunings, or to realise the potency of the biophilic need for proximity and connection with nature: with living things. I planted as many seeds and little plants as number of pages in this pamphlet.

The absolute need for kindness and a generosity that requires couples and small family groups to 'be' at ease, or in comfort, with conflicting patterns of work and activity have raised questions about need for looser-fit exterior and interior spatial modalities and about the potential for contingency spaces that move beyond 'The Stig of the Dump' to challenge the relationship between space and the

human body. Our bodies. Our spaces. Our sense of ourselves at ease: easy.

Loos once declared that the 'architect's general task is to provide a warm and liveable space'. Of course. And much more.

All of this reminds us that we are part of a whole. A community of people in a physical space, and that reminds me of Stephen Bates' excellent essay, 'The Space Between', wherein he concluded, 'that urban structures of physical proximity provide us with the necessary framework for social and cultural community, as well as the foundation for environmental sustainability'. And that energises me in the knowledge that it is, in the round, and in our towns and cities that we will best deal with the values of heritage and innovation: that by working within neighbourhoods that we can build better for us all.

Ciarán Mackel
Meitheamh 2020

ARdMackel is a creative enterprise that uses the complex terrain of cultural complexity, character and place to enliven the relations of architectural form and to ennoble the human condition.

By developing a high point of engagement ARdMackel aims to establish the common ground that enables multiple perspectives to be understood and used: a beacon that alerts all backgrounds and skillsets to the principle that their views are the mortar which bind place and space.

Housing, workplaces and urban infrastructure – the built framework of peoples' daily lives – is the core interest of the studio. In exploring their emotional energy ARdMackel seeks a re-validation for the role of architecture – one that uses knowledge, empathy and innovation to advance a deeper sensitivity for people and progress for society.

ARdMackel is led by the established and award-winning architect Ciarán Mackel. The design oriented architectural studio embeds the continuum that is politics, culture, economics and history within the contemporary development agenda of sustainability, civic society and neighbourhood renewal. Core is the belief that client and community, engagement and participation are the lifeblood of inspiring and relevant work.

The design process within the studio seeks to express how the brief and client requirement, the site and the pre-existing condition; the socio-economic and cultural situation can best be resolved through the architecture itself.

The final component of the studio is a research arm that considers

urban proposals influencing the public domain, whilst also giving expression to its own urban ideas. In generating further public debate and engagement ARdMackel seeks to explore the friction of architecture as both community expression and as personal vocation.

(Ard the Irish word for height; top; high; tall; loud; ambitious; excellent; noble or advanced is a metaphor for the ambitions and aspirations of the company.)

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